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Health Risks After the Storm

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Hillsborough County, FL - In response to heavy rain due to Tropical Storm Eta, residents are encouraged to exercise caution to prevent illness and injury. Tips to keep families safe include:

Food safety: Preventing foodborne illness

- Individuals should not eat any food that may have come into contact with contaminated water from floods or tidal surges.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels and then disinfect them in a solution of ¼ cup of bleach in one gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food. Assume that home-canned food is unsafe.
- Infants should be fed only pre-prepared canned baby formula. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Use sterile water when preparing formula.
- Do not eat fish taken from floodwater.

Well Contamination

- If a well has been submerged in flood water, it should be tested once the water recedes, since flood water may have entered the well casing and contaminated the well. It is recommended that residents boil the water or use an alternate water source until it has been tested and found to be safe.
- DOH-Hillsborough does not carry out private well sampling, however, residents can email DOH-Hillsborough at Info.HillsWeb@flhealth.gov, for a list of State-certified laboratories in Hillsborough County.

Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing waterborne illness

- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating, after toilet use, after participating in cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminate the floodwater or sewage.

- Flooding that occurs after heavy rain may mean that water contains fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial ways, and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and clean water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection. If a wound or sore develops redness, swelling or drainage, see a physician.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater. They can be exposed to water contaminated with fecal matter. Do not allow children to play with toys that been in floodwater until the toys have been disinfected. Use ¼ cup of bleach in one gallon of water.
- If you get your drinking water from a private well and you live in an area that has experienced flooding:
 - Disinfect your well using the procedures available from your local health department, or provided on the Florida Department of Health website at: http://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/private-welltesting/_documents/well-water-facts-disinfection.pdf; and
 - Have your water tested by your local health department, or by a laboratory certified by the State to do drinking water analyses.
- If your water system is under a boil water notice:
 - Boil the water before drinking, holding it in a rolling boil for one minute,
 - Use bottled water for drinking.

If Your Home is served by a Septic Tank:

- If your plumbing is functioning slowly, you should conserve water as much as possible. Minimize the use of washing machines and flush toilets only as necessary. Utilize portable toilets where provided. Fix any plumbing leaks as soon as possible.
- DO NOT have your septic tank pumped until the soil surrounding the tank is dry. When the ground is saturated with water, the tank might collapse if it is pumped dry. If the problem is the high water table, pumping the tank will not help.
- Do not have your septic system repaired until the ground has dried up. Septic systems are generally functional once flood waters go down. Remember - if your system was damaged, repairs must be permitted and inspected by the county health department.

How to Clean Up Sewage-Contaminated Items:

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and optionally disinfected with a solution of ¼ cup of bleach to one gallon of water.
- Do not mix ammonia cleansers with bleach as toxic vapors will form.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. Items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses, carpeting and upholstered furniture, should be discarded.

- Protective clothing such as rubber boots and waterproof gloves should be worn during cleanup.
- Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall.
- Once cleanup is complete it is important to dry out affected items to prevent the growth of mold.

To Protect Against Health Risks Associated with Mold:

- Remove standing water from your home or office.
- Remove wet materials.
- If mold growth has already occurred, carefully remove or clean the moldy material.
- Consider using personal protective equipment when cleaning or removing mold – gloves, goggles and an N-95 particle respirator (found at most local hardware stores).
- Check with a health care provider before wearing a respirator. Do not use a respirator if you have heart disease or chronic lung disease such as asthma or emphysema.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should not clean or remove moldy materials.

Animal Bite Prevention:

- Caution and alertness around unfamiliar animals is always a good idea. In general, do not approach animals, particularly wild or injured animals. If you are bitten, wash the wound thoroughly and contact your health care provider and animal control.
- A walking stick 5 to 6 feet long may be an effective tool for keeping animals at bay while working your way toward a vehicle or other means of escape.
- A walking stick is also good for moving objects which might hide a snake, scorpion or spider.

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